EOD AND LSCO IN DOCTRINE



By Lieutenant Colonel Edward R. Runyan and Captain Stephen M. Hartman

As the Army continues to modernize to meet 21st Century challenges, recent examples in Europe help illustrate the need to prepare for large-scale combat operations (LSCO). During the past 2 decades of counterinsurgency operations (COIN) and low-intensity conflict, there has been an evolution of tactics that differ considerably from those used in the initial invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

What was old is now new, and what was new has now become old. While modern LSCO doctrine continues to evolve through lessons learned in the decisive-action training environment, functional capabilities such as explosive-ordnance disposal (EOD) continue to struggle in the transition of codifying doctrine from COIN to LSCO. While there is much debate within the EOD career field regarding how to best enable protection of forces and lethality in LSCO, the lack of definitive EOD LSCO doctrine continues to inhibit EOD inclusion in the decisive-action training environment. As with previous conflicts, this lack of inclusion creates unacceptable risk to combat operations, as EOD personnel cannot effectively posture to meet battlefield requirements, especially during initial entry into theater. Simply stated, the lack of definitive EOD LSCO doctrine continues to hinder inclusion of EOD at combat training centers (CTCs) and warfighter exercises (WFXs). The way forward hinges on understanding how EOD has enabled actions across the warfighting functions and how the capability continues to enable these actions in LSCO.

Just as in COIN, EOD personnel support unified land operations in LSCO by detecting, identifying, conducting on-site evaluation of, rendering safe, exploiting, and achieving final disposition of all explosive ordnance, including improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and weapons of mass destruction. Over the course of 21 years of fighting in a COIN environment, the employment of EOD capabilities largely became synonymous with combating IEDs. With the proliferation of IEDs as the enemy's primary weapon on the battlefield, the road-to-war training for EOD personnel, for good reason, centered on counter-IED operations.

This arguably further caused maneuver commanders to view EOD forces as IED experts, rather than as overall explosive-ordnance experts who were capable of supporting missions across the full range of military operations. This could have been the start of the problem, as core EOD skill sets across the conventional chemical and nuclear ordnance spectrum atrophied over time. As Army training is diligently refined to regain these EOD skills, codified EOD LSCO doctrine is essential in providing both EOD and maneuver commanders with a framework for establishing how EOD functional capabilities contribute to each warfighting function, to lethality, and to overall mission success.



An EOD Soldier participates in a team competition. Photograph credit: Staff Sergeant Apolonia L. Gaspar.

The EOD community must develop effective doctrine that concentrates on a starting point for command relationships, the roles of functional EOD commands at echelon, EOD core contributions to warfighting functions, and key EOD contributions to foundational tactical mission tasks. EOD forces are often directed to integrate with supported maneuver elements at CTCs and in WFXs. However, while integration is essential for every enabler on the battlefield, directing enablers to integrate suggests that it is incumbent on individual enablers to advocate for their capabilities (almost as salespeople) and that the success of the integration is solely dependent on how they articulate the value of their capabilities to the maneuver commander's mission success. EOD LSCO doctrine must serve as a framework for transitioning current EOD integration efforts (which are heavily reliant on self-promotion) to integration efforts that are predicated upon a doctrinal foundation. While mission

variables inevitably change over time, EOD LSCO doctrine must serve as a common point of departure, promoting initial shared understanding of EOD capabilities and initial integration success.

Given the Army functions in written foundational references such as Army doctrine publications, Army regulations, and operation orders, how can Army EOD leaders solidify an immediate initial LSCO doctrinal solution? Initially, at least, they should acknowledge that EOD LSCO doctrine will inevitably change over time. Therefore, it is more important to establish an imperfect starting point than to debate and delay a more perfect solution. While there have been multiple after action reviews and other products related to EOD unit experiences at CTCs and WFXs over the past several years, one of the more recent and successful examples stems from the 242d Ordnance Battalion (EOD), Fort Carson, Colorado, experiences in support of the California National Guard 40th Infantry Division (40ID), Los Alamitos, California, during WFX 22-04. The experiences of the 242d Ordnance Battalion may help to serve as an imperfect starting point.

Upfront, the 242d Ordnance Battalion and 40ID were not designated training audiences for WFX 22-04. Throughout the training leading up to and during WFX 22-04, 40ID remained exceptionally receptive to 242d Ordnance Battalion training objectives. As a division enabler, the 242d Ordnance Battalion remained under the operational control of 40ID throughout the exercise, with direct coordination authorized to the 52d Ordnance Group (EOD), Fort Campbell, Kentucky, which served as the theater level EOD command. According to the 242d Ordnance Battalion after action reviews, this relationship allowed the 242d to understand and synchronize with the theater level EOD common operating picture. Through the 40ID rear-area command post, the 242d used the protection warfighting function as a main conduit for influencing actions across the other warfighting functions. The 242d Ordnance Battalion commander remained the senior EOD advisor to the 40ID and retained the ability to move and posture subordinate EOD companies across the 40ID close and rear areas in order to meet current and projected EOD requirements. While other CTC and WFX after action reviews outline how supported units have delegated command relationships to units commonly referred to as "pockets for enablers" (such as maneuver enhancement brigades and brigade engineer battalions), the 242d remained in direct operational control of 40ID. This allowed the 242d to establish a division level EOD common operating picture and inform 40ID about how residual battlefield enemy and friendly explosive ordnance might impact future combat operations as the division deep area transitions to the division close area and the close area transitions to the division rear area.

While the 242d Ordnance Battalion experience may not be a perfect example, it can serve as viable doctrinal starting point. Three main takeaways may, at a minimum, help establish a foundational understanding of the EOD battalion role at the division level. First, the 242d Ordnance



An EOD officer works a lane in a bomb suit during a multi-Service competition. Photograph credit: Staff Sergeant Apolonia L. Gaspar.

Battalion remained in operational control of the division throughout all phases of the exercise, enabling the 242d to support division operations across the deep, close, and rear areas. Second, the 242d commander retained the ability to posture exceptionally limited EOD capabilities to best meet collective division requirements; this was particularly vital given the limited quantity of EOD capabilities in the exercise theater. Third, through the rear-area command post, the 242d remained a key operational contributor, advising the 40ID on battlefield explosive-ordnance risk and providing viable mitigation strategies. This demonstrated the role that EOD plays in enabling lethality. By starting with EOD battalion LSCO doctrine and then using these takeaways, Army EOD personnel may help further develop doctrine at echelons above and below the division. This would also help array and posture limited EOD capabilities to support the most likely tactical mission tasks at the brigade echelon and below.

With the manning reductions currently underway at EOD battalion and ordnance group headquarters, doctrinal development is even more imperative. As in COIN, the need for EOD across the deep, close, and rear areas at each echelon is abundant and critical. We ask that the Army publish doctrine that clearly defines how EOD enables lethality and mission success without waiting for unanimous consent. We further request the establishment of a common framework for EOD company and battalion level leaders to follow and, in the process, the creation of a road map to prepare EOD Soldiers to better support LSCO.

Lieutenant Colonel Runyan is an EOD officer who commanded the 242d Ordnance Battalion (EOD) from July 2020 to July 2022. He holds a master's degree in military art and science from the Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Captain Hartman is the operations officer in charge at the 71st Ordnance Group, Fort Carson. He holds a bachelor's degree in biology from Crown College, St. Bonifacius, Minnesota.